

# Producing ESP Materials: From the First Draft to the Final Product

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*By Maria Spiropoulou*

## **The First Attempts**

In 1986 we were assigned by the State Pedagogical Institute to design ESP courses for the Technical and Vocational Lyceum in several specialties: Electronics, Electricians, Mechanical Engineering Technicians, Heating and Refrigeration Technicians, and Assistants of Medical Laboratories. Although we were experienced ESP teachers at this same Lyceum, we found the task at hand challenging and difficult.

With the help of the subject specialist and the guidelines of the English language advisors, we defined the specific target needs of the learners' subject area and decided on the approach to be followed. The factor that greatly influenced our ESP programme was a view of language more as subject oriented vocabulary and a set of grammatical structures and less as a set of functions and skills. Therefore, we came up with job-oriented texts which we exploited by producing mostly comprehension questions, True-False statements, and language exercises in vocabulary and grammar. The grammatical items practiced were derived from the predominant grammatical phenomena existing in the text. Finally the vocabulary - teaching exercises were mainly of word formation and definitions.

The aim of this course was to develop the students' reading skills of technical texts, so that learners would be able to read job-oriented texts. However, the structural approach used in our books had long ago come into criticism. The result was that the learner failed to comprehend and construct higher than a sentence level of discourse such as paragraphs or speech units. Because this approach did not promote student- student interaction and creative use of the language, the exercises were mechanical, and not meaningful.

Despite the deficiencies of our books, they were accepted positively by both our colleagues and students. The teachers' original reluctance towards the subject matter was turned into willingness due to the cooperation and participation of the students. Even students with poor linguistic backgrounds were motivated and got involved in the teaching/learning process due to their knowledge of the subject matter.

## **Revising and Updating the Materials**

Because of the deficiencies inherent in the methodology, two of the members of the team and the English language advisor were assigned to revise and update these materials. Considering the feedback from both teachers and students, the previous experience in materials writing, and

training in new methodologies and approaches, we had a better grasp of what a communicative ESP text should be.

Our starting point now was our intention to create a communicative syllabus, that is, to see the language not simply as a system, but rather to see it in use. We broke the language down into both functions (use) and structures (form) and organised our syllabus in terms of topics. Examples of the functions included are "giving instructions", "identifying parts of a whole", "describing tools, equipment and procedures", "writing reports", "handling telephone calls", "decoding authentic documents", and "developing elliptical speech". Examples of topics from the book on *Electricity* are: "Energy supply and demand", "Power distribution systems", "Electric machines", "Safety at work", and "The Electrical trade."

Our new language teaching goals enabled students to learn by using the language in meaningful, interactive situations. We felt that our job as teachers was not only to offer a description of the language but also, through our materials, to create conditions in the classroom that would help our students learn through active involvement in activities and tasks. In other words, our major concern was to develop the communicative competence of the students; i.e., having them comprehend and produce appropriate discourse in the work field. To achieve these goals:

- We introduced pair- and group-work activities in our materials apart from the ones carried out individually. Our objective was to help the teacher become an organiser and facilitator of learning rather than an informant.
- We shifted the emphasis from reading- and vocabulary-learning skills to include listening, speaking, and writing as well.
- We used authentic reading excerpts from instructional manuals, technical brochures, and product advertisements which we adapted to our situation.
- We included grammatical items taught in meaningful situations and derived from the subject matter of the students' specialty.
- We developed communicative activities ranging from controlled or guided practice to free production such as role-playing, simulations, games, information-gap, critical thinking, and problem-solving activities.

Designing communicative activities is demanding and requires creativity, but at the same time, it is extremely rewarding as it offers the students an opportunity for immediate application of learning. We considered their inclusion as a vital component of our courses, as the students can integrate the language items and skills in different situations.

Samples of activities included in the recently revised and updated book *Electricity* are presented below.

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### ACTIVITY I: Use of passive voice

#### AIM

This activity leads to the free production of the passive voice, extensively dealt with in the grammar section of the unit "Energy supply and demand".

#### SITUATION

*The six fatal errors*

You may know that the Chernobyl disaster ironically occurred while the operators of the plant were trying to carry out a safety test. During the test they made six fatal errors ignoring important operating regulations. If any of these errors had not been made, the accident would not have occurred.

*Use the cues on the next page to write six sentences (in passive voice) about the errors which resulted in the Chernobyl disaster.*

1. Operators shut off emergency cooling system to conduct test. e.g.  
The emergency cooling system was shut off to conduct the test.
2. They lowered reactor power output too much and switched off automatic control system making it difficult to control reactor.
3. Workers reduced flow of cooling water and turned off power to turbines which resulted in dangerous overheating of unit.
4. They blocked automatic signal which shuts reactor down if turbines stop.
5. Operators turned off safety devices which shut reactor down if steam pressure of water levels became abnormal.

6. They pulled control rods out of core.

## ACTIVITY II: Report writing

### AIM

Based on a motor fault-finding chart, (found in the unit on "Electrical Machines") which has been taught previously in terms of vocabulary, reading comprehension, and elliptical speech, this activity practises the skill of report writing. The students are asked to write their report taking information from the chart and filling in gaps. This provides students with an opportunity to use the vocabulary and expressions from their work field.

### SITUATION

Usually when you are hired to maintain and repair machines, you are asked to write a report of the procedure you followed.

You were employed by the production manager of "Mevis Co." to repair one of its motors. *Study the fault-finding chart and the pattern of the report below and then write your own report taking information from the chart.*

**Fault-Finding Chart (Extract)**

symptoms	causes	remedy
1. Motor doesn't start.	1. No power supply 2. Fuse blown 3. Load too heavy 4. Control system stuck open	1. Check power supply. 2. Replace fuse. 3. Check if motor starts without load. If yes reduce load or replace with motor of greater horsepower. 4. Repair or replace control device.
2. Motor hums excessively.	5. Improperly wired 6. Low line voltage 7. Starting capacitor defective.	5. Check wiring against electrical diagrams 6. Check main line voltage as marked on nameplate. 7. Replace starting

		capacitor.
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**To:** Mevis Co. Ltd.

**Kind of job:** Repair of motor No. 063 **Cost of job:** \_\_\_\_\_

I was employed by the production manager of your company to repair a motor driving one of the factory's machines. The motor (symptom). I examined all the possible causes, that is the/if+(S.Past) ( *causes* ). Finally I found that the damage was due to ( *cause* ), I ( *repair* ), and so the damage was remedied.

The cost mentioned above includes:

- a. price of spare parts
- b. labour
- c. V.A.T.\*

SignatureDate

\_\_\_\_\_.\_\_\_\_\_.

Name in full

\* *Value Added Tax*

### ACTIVITY III: Using authentic documents

#### AIM

This activity familiarizes students with authentic documents, trains them to understand elliptical speech, and decode it. It is included in the unit "Power distribution systems".

#### SITUATION

*An electric power consumption bill*

Power corporations, either public or private, send bills to their customers to inform them about the power consumption and its cost. A sample bill is illustrated below.

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EPC ELECTRICTY e		AT YOUR SERVICE				
Mr. A. N. Thomson Shepherd's Lane Oxford						
Meter Reading		units used	Pence per unit	Amount £	Standing Charge	totals £
this time	last time					
05178	03930	1218	5.16	64,40	10.14	74.54
01467	00379	88	1.90	16,70		16.70
DO NOT PAY. THIS ACCOUNT WILL BE CLEARED BY DIRECT DEBIT OF YOUR BANK A/C ON 9 MAR 94.						
YOUR CUSTOMER NUMBER		YOU PHONE US ON	PERIOD ENDING	AMOUNT DUE		
zz 11222337799		CAMM 88888	13 Feb 94	£ 91.24		

## TASK 2

*Study the bill and answer the questions:*

1. What does the abbreviation EPC stand for?
2. Do you think this bill is addressed to an industrial or to a domestic consumer? Justify your answer.
3. There are two unit charges in this bill. Which one of them concerns night-time electricity consumption?
4. To understand better the information included in the bill match the two columns.

### A

1. This account will be cleared by direct debit of your bank account
2. Amount due
3. Units used
4. Period ending

### B

- a. amount of money regularly paid to the power corporation with each bill, regardless of the customer's consumption.
- b. amount of electricity consumed measured in units.
- c. the bank will pay the bill for you taking the money from your account.
- d. amount of money which someone is obliged to pay.

5. Standing charge                      e. date which determines the end of the period of consumption and the beginning of the next.

### **TASK 3**

*Study the bill again and complete the missing information in the text that follows.*

The bill illustrated above has been issued by (1) e.g. EPC ELECTRICITY.

It is addressed to a consumer with

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

zz11222337799 and covers the period of consumption until

(3) \_\_\_\_\_. The name

(4) \_\_\_\_\_ is A.N. Thomson and he

lives (5) \_\_\_\_\_ in Oxford.

According to the last and this time (6) \_\_\_\_\_, Mr.

Thomson has used (7) \_\_\_\_\_ units of day time

electricity consumption and 88 of (8) \_\_\_\_\_. The unit

charge for the day time electricity consumption is 5.16p. while the cheap

(9) \_\_\_\_\_ is 1.90p. Mr. Thomson has

additionally been charged with a (10) \_\_\_\_\_ of \$10.14.

As a result the total (11) \_\_\_\_\_ to the company by Mr.

Thomson is 091.24 which the customer won't pay since

(12) \_\_\_\_\_ on March 9, 1994. In case that the customer needs

any further information concerning this bill he may

(13) \_\_\_\_\_ the company on CAMM.88888.

## **Answer Key to the Activities**

### **ACTIVITY I**

*The six fatal errors*

1. The emergency cooling system was shut off to conduct the test.
2. The reactor power output was lowered too much and the automatic control system (was) switched off making it difficult to control the reactor.
3. The flow of cooling water was reduced and the power to the turbines (was) turned off which resulted in dangerous overheating of the unit.

4. The automatic signal which shuts the reactor down, if the turbines stop, was blocked.
5. The safety devices which shut the reactor down, if the steam pressure or the water levels become abnormal, were turned off.
6. Most control rods were pulled out of the core.

## **ACTIVITY II**

*Suggested answers to the short report.*

I was employed by the production manager of your company to repair a motor driving one of the factory's machines. The motor hummed excessively. I examined all the possible causes; that is, if a) the motor was improperly wired, b) the line voltage was low, c) the starting capacitor was defective. Finally, I found that the damage was due to the defective starting capacitor. I replaced it and so the damage was remedied.

## **ACTIVITY III**

### ***Task 1***

- a. The abbreviation EPC stands for Electric Power Corporation.
- b. It is addressed to a domestic consumer. Two pieces of information included in the bill prove that: 1. the fact that it is addressed to an individual (Mr. Thomson), 2. the fact that the consumption (1248 units used) is very low for an industrial consumer.
- c. The second charge because night-time consumption charges are cheaper (1.90) than the day-time ones.

### ***Task 2***

1-c, 2-d, 3-b, 4-e, 5-a

### ***Task 3***

The following words are those which the students have to use to complete the blanks in the text.

(1) EPC Electricity, (2) customer number (3) 13 February 1994, (4) of the customer, (5) at Shepherd's Lane, (6) meter readings, (7) 1248, (8) night-time ones (9) night-time electricity consumption, (10) standing charge (11) amount due, (12) this account will be cleared by direct debit of his bank A/C, (13) phone.